

RESIDENT FOOD EQUITY ADVISORS

FOOD AND PUBLIC HOUSING RECOMMENDATIONS

WITH **BALTIMORE FOOD POLICY AND PLANNING** AND **THE HOUSING AUTHORITY OF BALTIMORE CITY**



2020 RESIDENT FOOD EQUITY ADVISORS OVERVIEW

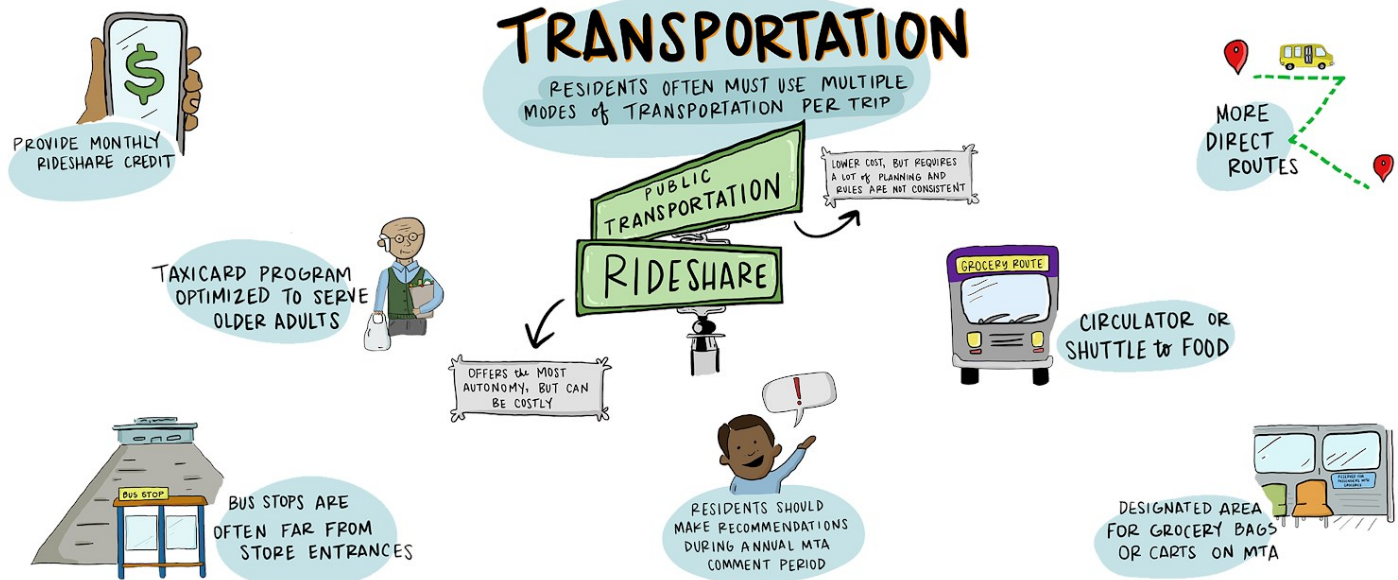
The Resident Food Equity Advisors (RFEA) work with Baltimore Food Policy and Planning to drive equitable food policies through an inclusive, resident-informed process and exchange of ideas. Advisors are chosen through a competitive application process based on their passion for the issue, personal experience related to the topic, ability to commit to the group, and willingness to engage in deep, continual dialogue over 6+ meetings. Advisors are compensated for their time.

The 2020 RFEA represented 13 residents of public housing from each of the Housing Authority of Baltimore City (HABC) Family Developments. Over the course of six meetings, Advisors discussed their visions for the intersections of food and public housing in collaboration with Food Policy and Planning and HABC Office of Resident Services. Various organizations and subject matter professionals joined the meetings to provide information and answer questions. Advisors engaged in activities to share preferences and took brief surveys to provide additional data for the group to consider.

This document summarizes the discussions and the key recommendations provided over six meetings. Three meetings were held in person between January and March 2020, and due to the coronavirus pandemic and restrictions on meetings, three meetings were held virtually. The pandemic significantly impacted the food system and food access for Advisors, and these experiences are reflected throughout the recommendations.



The Advisors generated this set of recommendations from their lived experiences and intimate knowledge of Baltimore's food system. They hope that the solutions they envision will improve food equity in and around HABC properties. These recommendations are presented to HABC, Baltimore Food Policy and Planning, and other agencies and organizations that can implement change to improve Baltimore's food system and move towards the vision for food and public housing depicted above.



Most Advisors do not have a personal vehicle and also live in Healthy Food Priority Areas (formerly called food deserts) without close access to preferred food sources. For these reasons, transportation was closely linked to almost any other topic of conversation. In order to get food, Advisors use rides from friends and family, rideshares, buses, hacks, walking, or some combination. Transportation is really about a calculation of time and cost for most. For example, when determining which store is most affordable, Advisors must account for how much it costs and how long it takes to get to and from a food source in addition to the price of food.

KEY DISCUSSION TOPICS

Maryland Department of Transportation (MDTA) presented and led a conversation on public transportation, and Advisors were briefed on a rideshare pilot in West and South Baltimore.

Public Transportation: Buses often do not have direct routes between family developments and preferred stores. Rules are unclear and inconsistent about bringing personal carts or many bags on board, which deters some people from using the bus. Even if a bus stop is close to a store, the distance to the entrance from the stop can be very far across a parking lot. Advisors were in favor of shuttles between HABC properties and stores, but HABC discussed the limitations of these services they had sponsored in the past, such as schedule and cost of insurance.

Rideshare: Rideshare provides the most autonomy for those without cars. Advisors use rideshare when they have the funds to do so, but rides continue to get more expensive.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Organize HABC residents to collectively provide input during MDTA comment periods every December and during other feedback processes.
- To make buses (MDTA, Charm City Circulator, shuttles) more viable for food shopping:
 - ◇ Modify routes to create more direct connections from HABC communities to grocery stores.
 - ◇ Ensure that drivers are aware of rules that allow personal carts used to transport groceries.
 - ◇ Create a designated section on buses that has fold up seats to allow for a limited number of carts.
- Seek funding to provide rideshare credits to HABC residents to get to the grocery store.
- Ensure the existing Taxicard program best serves older adults living in Family Developments.

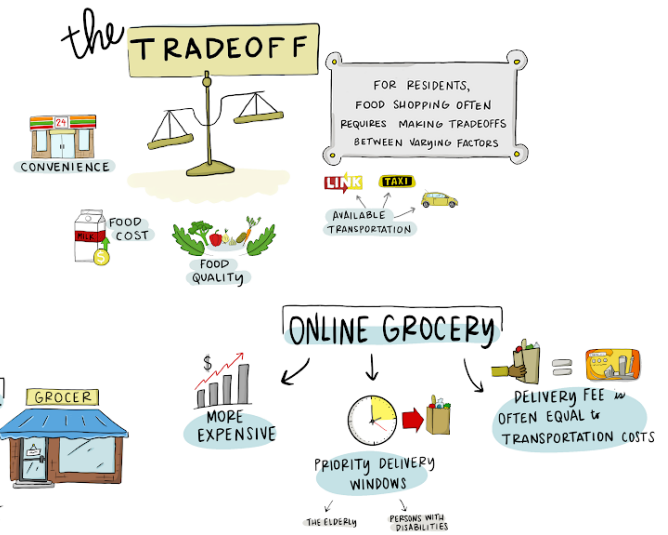
BUYING FOOD

MANY HABC FAMILY DEVELOPMENTS ARE IN HEALTHY FOOD PRIORITY AREAS



BRICK & MORTAR

- ★ SUPERMARKETS
- ★ CORNER STORE
- ★ CONVENIENCE STORE
- ★ DOLLAR STORE



Most Family Developments are in Healthy Food Priority Areas— areas that lack supermarkets and where residents face additional barriers to accessing healthy food. Advisors identified supermarkets as their primary source for food shopping, followed by corner and convenience stores, then dollar stores. Food quality and the ability to purchase produce, high-quality meat, perishable items, as well as water, are key factors for where advisors choose to shop. The majority of Advisors shop at more than one store to find the affordable, culturally appropriate foods they want and need.

KEY DISCUSSION TOPICS

With low car ownership, grocery delivery is appealing, though Advisors discussed many limitations. Online grocery shopping and delivery were made more relevant by the pandemic and the launch of payment by Online Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits. These significant shifts created unexpected emphasis on online grocery shopping whenever buying food was discussed.

Online Grocery Ordering: Advisors emphasized the need for flexible and secure delivery, but acknowledged safety limitations. Those who had ordered groceries online found that prices were higher, even before delivery fees, and there was an inability to use coupons. A big takeaway was that these additional costs were about equivalent to paying for transportation to get to a preferred store, so the value was more dependent on factors aside from price. Several Advisors said they would never order online due to wanting to choose their own food and viewing shopping as a social experience.

Online SNAP: Online SNAP was first discussed in February, and again in June after the program launched during the pandemic. Online SNAP is not available at all the retailers the Advisors prefer for shopping, and coupons cannot be used in most cases.

COVID-19 Response: Some found that additional SNAP benefits through the pandemic relief were barely noticeable because prices increased and certain foods were harder to find. It was difficult to get a preferred delivery window without scheduling days in advance, especially after Online SNAP launched.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- To make ordering groceries online and Online SNAP viable options for more people:
 - ◇ Expand the number of authorized Online SNAP retailers to include a wider variety of stores.
 - ◇ Improve technology training for online grocery ordering, especially for older adults and people with disabilities.
 - ◇ Prioritize grocery delivery windows for older adults and people with disabilities.
- Secure revenue streams to prioritize matching dollars and incentives for Online SNAP.
- To shape the food environment of future public housing redevelopment, residents should co-develop plans with developers and potential grocer tenants to match store type with HABC resident needs and preferences. Consider community-controlled retail models like cooperatives.



Advisors recounted experiences with food pantries, federal nutrition benefits like SNAP, food giveaways, and the increased food resources that were made available during COVID-19. In general, residents felt that many types of assistance came with overly burdensome processes and rules, and there was a lack of consideration for dietary restrictions and allergies, as well as a lack of choice. Some Advisors mentioned stigma with receiving assistance and countered that just because they are low-income should not mean they should be allocated low-quality products or have to accept whatever is given.

KEY DISCUSSION TOPICS

The Maryland Food Bank (MFB) and CHARMCare joined an in-person meeting, and Food Policy staff facilitated several phone calls during the pandemic about City's Emergency Food Response. Advisors discussed personal experiences and their communities at-large, and while food assistance was important prior to COVID, these resources were critical during the pandemic. Issues about disparities in food quality that were raised in initial discussions were brought into sharp focus during the pandemic.

Food Pantries: Residents find noticeable differences in food quality and operations between different pantries and giveaways, including issues with undesirable and spoiled food. The demand for produce and perishables like meat always feels unmet. Advisors discussed that having pantries on-site at Family Developments would create steadier access to assistance, and would ensure systems are in place to be better prepared during emergencies. Several Advisors offered to volunteer if these pantries are created.

Communications: Advisors find it difficult to know about all the resources and understand them as a system. They feel that flyers and in-person information are the best way to communicate with many HABC residents.

COVID-19 Response: The City was able to quickly provide shelf-stable resources, with HABC distributing 10,000 boxes door to door at Family Developments early in the pandemic. While some less formal channels led to residents receiving unsafe or poor quality food, there were many instances of community members taking care of each other that could be built on during future emergencies.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Host a food pantry on site at each family development and/or partner with nearby pantries to ensure residents have access to high quality food on a regular basis and during times of emergency.
- Develop a resident-approved process to allow food to be distributed at Family Developments. Include processes for mutual aid and outside donations, as well as food safety and quality protocols.
- In future emergencies, fresh food resources should be purchased or otherwise procured to ensure that all residents have access to high quality product and do not have to rely solely on recovered or second-quality donations.

GROWING FOOD

OPPORTUNITY FOR GROWING FOOD
AT EVERY FAMILY DEVELOPMENT SITE



Several Advisors had interest in growing food in the past, but were unclear about the rules or how to participate in nearby farms or gardens. There was hesitancy that growing spaces may be unkempt or attract rodents, creating a need for structured programs with designated leads. Not all residents want to grow their own produce and there is ample opportunity to partner with other urban farms, farmers markets, or produce wholesalers to get more produce to HABC residents through on-site sales or giveaways.

KEY DISCUSSION TOPICS

Because fresh produce is lacking in most Family Development neighborhoods, Advisors discussed growing food as an option to increase access. The topic was broken down into growing food (or herbs or flowers) for personal use such as in community gardens or yards, having an urban farm on-site to sell or donate to residents, and developing outlets for residents to purchase high quality affordable produce.

Gardening: There was a desire for clearly defined spaces for residents to grow food on site, like a community garden or greenhouse. Current HABC rules may not allow residents to utilize their lawns or outdoor spaces to grow food. Advisors want to ensure growing spaces are well-kept and suggest having designated staff or volunteers to maintain growing spaces, but making opportunities open to residents. Residents would seek education on how to grow food and prepare it if they had the space.

Farming: The majority of Advisors saw value in having a well-managed farm on or near their family developments. HABC has an opportunity to support a large-scale urban farm project on HUD-owned land like the Windy City Harvest farm on-site at a Chicago Housing Authority development., or the Farms at NYCHA (New York City Housing Authority) program.

Purchasing local food: Farmers markets are well-liked for produce, but not everyone knows about them or can shop during the limited hours. Options like CSAs where you cannot choose your items are not preferred by Advisors. Urban farms near HABC developments should improve communications with residents about opportunities to buy or receive produce.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Dedicate community garden space at each Family Development. Employ or designate a lead gardener to coordinate resident use and distribution of collective produce.
- Enlist partner organizations to provide garden and food preparation education to HABC participants.
- Assess HABC landscape guidelines to provide residents with opportunities to grow food, herbs and flowers in their home property, as well as parameters for upkeep.
- Brief HABC leadership on urban farm models using Housing Authority properties and in redevelopment. In particular, assess the potential to lease or transfer unoccupied HUD land in Cherry Hill for a large-scale agriculture project.
- Partner with farmers/gardeners to sell food on-site at Family Developments.

ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Advisors offered other overarching recommendations and considerations that do not fit into a specific topic area. Some of these included:

- Designate an HABC staff person in the central office in charge of overseeing all food efforts across developments and the agency at-large.
- Include communications about services and food-related opportunities with rent statements.
- Develop ways for Resident Food Equity Advisors to stay involved with HABC processes and/or consider similar resident-driven processes for topics beyond food. Explore or replicate concepts like the NYCHA Public Housing Food Leadership Innovation Lab.
- Some Family Developments are in the process of redevelopment or will be in the future. As sites become more mixed income, Advisors were adamant that care is taken so that the needs of lower-income residents do not get deprioritized. They also saw opportunities to capitalize on new relationships with a broader range of residents who may be able to volunteer, donate, and bring additional perspectives. Including Resident Food Equity Advisors in the redevelopment visioning and planning is a key way to ensure that food is incorporated into the fabric of these sites.

CONCLUSION

Being intentional about food in the physical and social environments of Family Developments provides opportunities for residents to shape their food systems, increases access to resources without leaving the neighborhood, and creates greater community resilience. Many of these recommendations are intended for HABC to implement in relation to HABC properties and policies, but many will require partnership with City agencies, community organizations, non-profits, and other residents. All Baltimore City residents deserve an equitable food environment, and through these Resident Food Equity Advisors recommendations and other community-led processes, there is an extraordinary opportunity to collectively build some of those solutions in and around public housing Family Developments.

2020 RESIDENT FOOD EQUITY ADVISORS

Brooklyn Homes:	Shapree Melton
Cherry Hill Homes:	Daisha Davis
Douglass Homes:	Yahkini Blackwell, Diane Corbett, Tradina Demary
Gilmor Homes:	Lamar Hardy, Sherice Nelson
O'Donnell Heights:	Chanteuse May
Perkins Homes:	Constance Lancaster-Kelly, Michele McCall, Tyra Smith
Poe Homes:	Mary Jones
Westport Homes:	James Carter



Monica Navarro-Leonard took “graphic notes” during each meeting and synthesized them for each topic to create the visuals in this document.

CONTACT INFORMATION

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